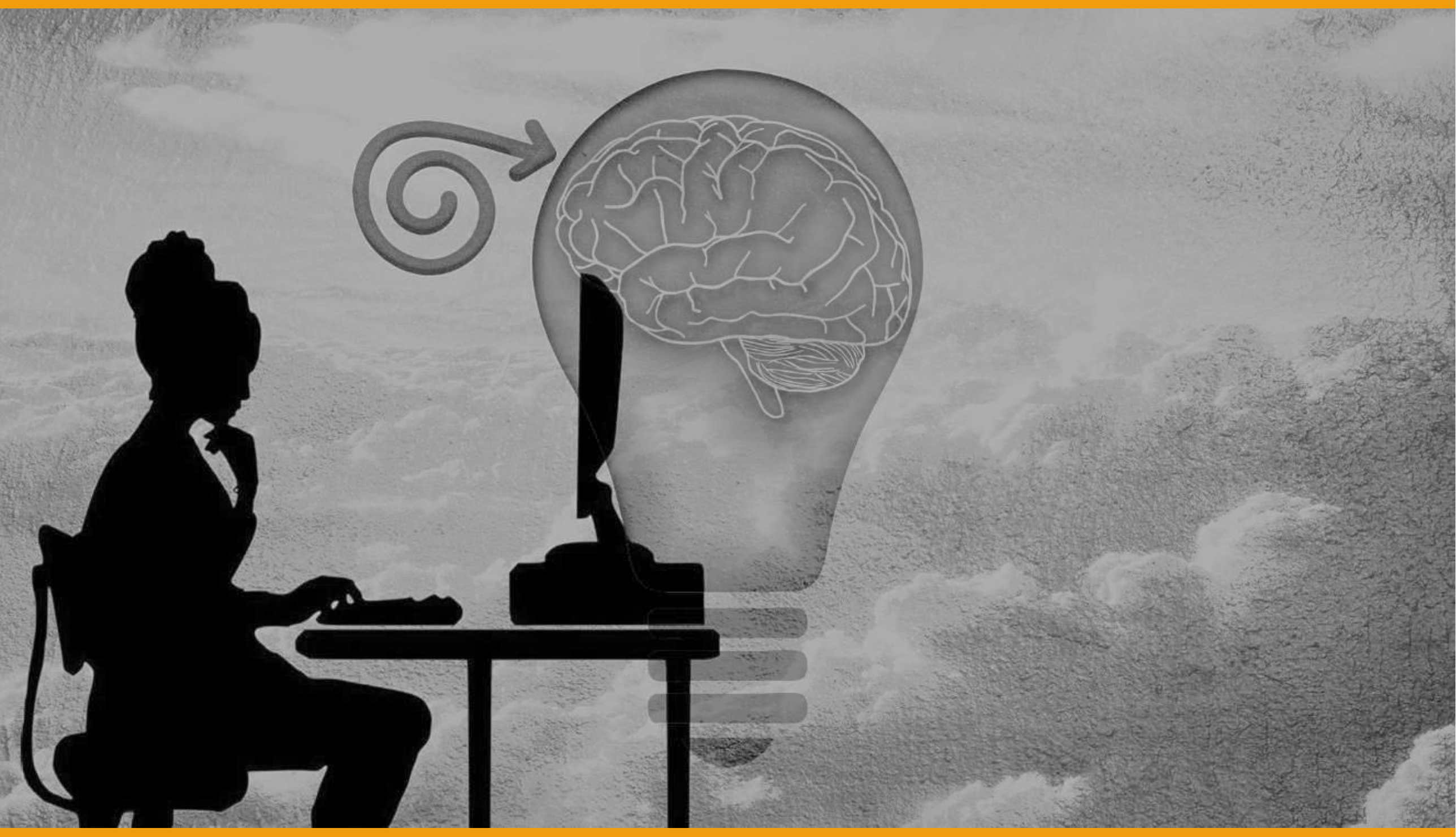

MINDSET FOR WOMEN

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CHAPTER 1

MINDSET

THE ESTABLISHED SET OF ATTITUDES SOMEONE HOLDS

From the time a woman is born, she is immersed in cultural "Good Girl" idioms. You know the type: "Be a good girl." "Don't be bossy." "Aren't you pretty?"

While meant well, these words do not position a woman adequately for pending adulthood, but rather a lifetime of people-pleasing and perfectionism.

Because of the way girls are wired, they come into the world with an earlier awareness of social norms and unwritten rules than boys. This predisposes girls to be first in line for praise; however, it also sets them up to lag behind when the need comes to exhibit their confidence as an adult.

Praise feels good. It does not take girls long to figure out that if they do what others expect, they will receive praise in return - as good a reward as any sort of candy.

This cycle of praise and reward turns girls into perpetual pleasers and strangers to themselves. It hinders their ability to access their own value.

Boys on the other hand may receive more reprimand than praise early on. But as a result, they are less dependent on external praise and have a better sense of who they are and the value they bring to the table. This allows them to show up more confidently in the workplace in adulthood.

It's not that girls who've grown up to be working women can't show up confidently in the workplace. They may just have to work harder at it than men.

As human beings, we have two primary mindsets that shape our lives: fixed and growth. Early praise feeds a girl's fixed mindset.

Someone with a fixed mindset believes their qualities cannot change. Conversely, someone with a growth mindset believes their basic qualities can be cultivated with effort and persistence.

Children who receive conditional praise are inclined to have a more active fixed mindset as adults. Comments like, "You're so pretty," "You're so smart," and "You're such a good girl" are labels. People self-identify with the labels they are given. "You're so pretty," translates into ``I'm pretty." "You're so smart," turns into "I'm smart - maybe even the smartest."

If you're at the top, where else is there to go? Who else is there to be? Conditional praise can easily be misinterpreted as a direct measure of one's competence and worth, spiraling into an urgency to prove one's self over and over again. In the most extreme sense, it becomes about survival.

Someone with a fixed mindset is driven to succeed because their sense of self depends on it. On the contrary, someone with a growth mindset is all about stretching themselves.

Growth mindset is born out of unconditional praise. Effort is the focus of the praise, releasing the recipient to use their mind more freely and fully.

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For instance, the comment "Great job! You must have worked really hard on that," is about the effort, rather than the person, which makes an important distinction between the person and the behavior.

The good news is you can change your mindset by changing your thinking.

Mindset is just beliefs written on mental tape tracks playing on an endless loop. The same way a thought became first, it can become last when you choose to erase and replace it with another message.

It's just like changing a habit. The thing about habits is, despite the fact that they start as thoughts, they are more often associated with repeated behavior. Thoughts don't manifest themselves outside of our heads. For this reason, thoughts are hard to notice, and as a result, even harder to change.

At one time, that repetitive thought may have offered protection. Fast-forward to today, and chances are that thought no longer serves you.

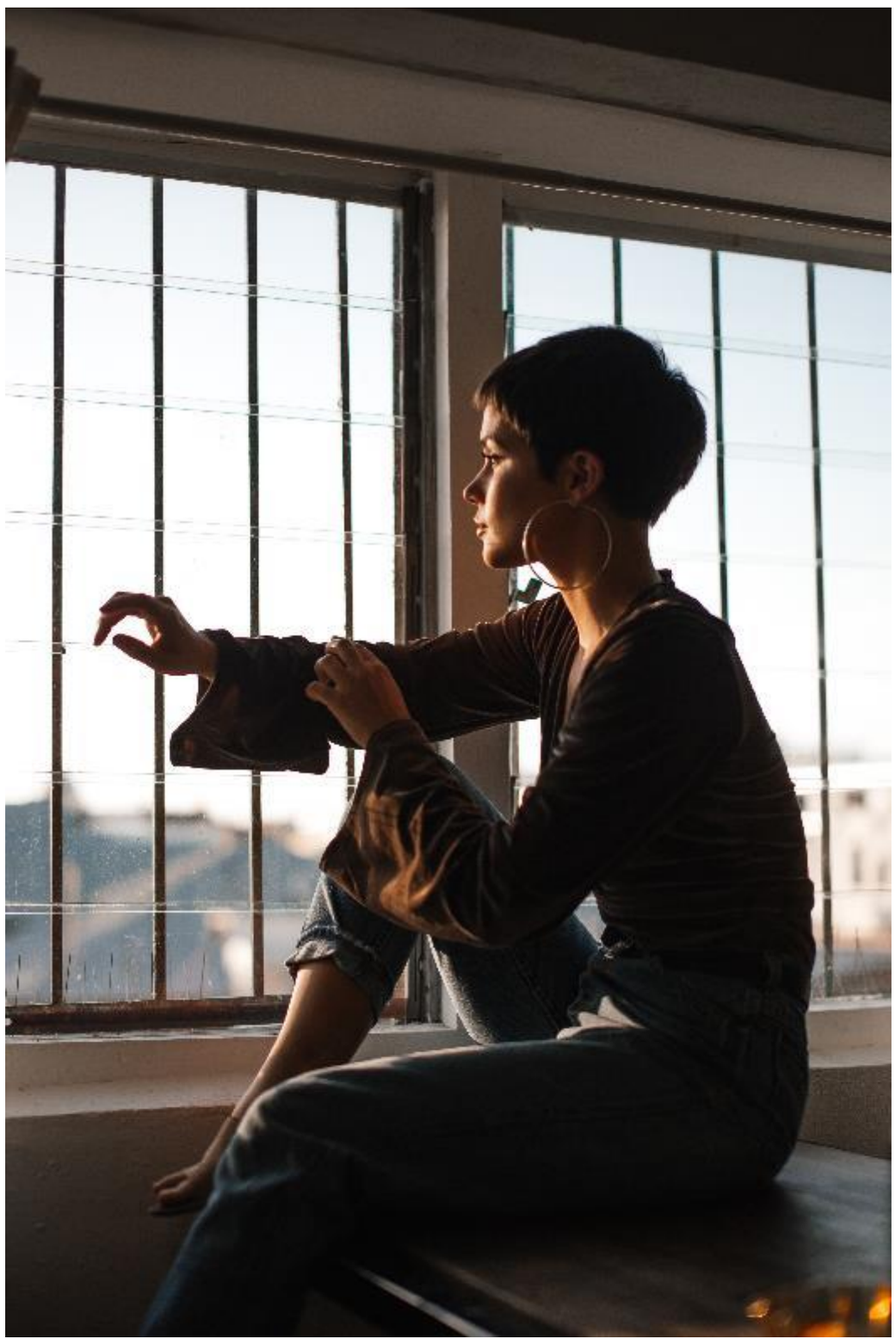
For instance, a young girls' thought that she must be perfect may have protected her from the sting of rejection or someone else's disappointment, but as an adult woman it keeps her stuck, too afraid to take a risk.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. In Sally Helgesen's book *How Women Rise*, Sally features 12 habits holding women back from their next raise, promotion, or job. Every one of those habits is deep-seated in a fixed mindset.

When a woman operates from a fixed mindset, she is always in danger of being measured by a failure. So, she races to prove herself over and over. This is as opposed to women who believe their basic qualities can be developed, and thus failures do not define them.

That's not to say a woman who primarily holds a growth mindset does not experience a fixed mindset in other areas of her life. All of us have elements of both mindsets.

However, for women with a primary fixed mindset, everything is about the outcome. No matter how gifted and talented she may be, she dwells in a space of emotional vulnerability that keeps her playing small. The stakes for not measuring up are too high.



This is how we end up with Impostor Syndrome and Good Girl Syndrome. Both are rooted in self- doubt and fraudulent feelings of inadequacy.

How many times have you felt like you're just not enough? Not smart, pretty, or confident enough? It bears asking the question, by whose standards are we measuring ourselves? A parent, a teacher or coach from years past, a partner, a past or present boss? Or perhaps even ourselves?

CHAPTER 2

SELF-ACCEPTANCE

THE ACT OR STATE OF ACCEPTING ONESELF

Self-acceptance is the countermeasure. Once a woman discovers she was never meant to be perfect - that it's okay to fail if she learns from it, that she is enough just the way she is - the shackles begin to come off. She is freed to fulfill her potential.

It's no longer all about the outcome. By virtue of renewing her mind with a growth mindset, a woman can detach from outcomes and value who she is and what she does regardless of the results.

Where a fixed mindset closes off change and development, a growth mindset encourages it. People with a growth mindset gain confidence in themselves as they meet and master new challenges. However, those with a fixed mindset are at risk of their confidence eroding in the face of the same challenges.

Confidence is more fragile for someone with a fixed mindset. Their sense of self rides on outcome and leaves them nursing and protecting their confidence when they could be growing and developing themselves.

There is a lot of unused talent out there, concealed behind the veil of a fixed mindset.

A fixed mindset limits a woman's achievements. It fills her mind with self-limiting and interfering thoughts that hinder her performance. A growth mindset embraces full- scale effort and helps her grow and prosper.

One of the ways women hamper their performance is by trusting too much in other people's opinions. Carol Dweck writes about this in her book, *Mindset - The New Psychology of Success*.

I had always wondered why I put so much more stock in other people's opinions of me than my own. Now I know why. It goes back to the early messaging young girls receive, like, "You're so cute." "You're so well behaved." Your so helpful."

When we're little we delight in people telling us these things. Heck, even when we are older, they are nice to hear. The problem lies in girls learning to trust other people's estimates of them over their own.

A little girl may perceive that because people are so nice to her, their criticisms must be as true as their compliments. Many high achieving women are affected by this. They think other people's opinions are a good way of knowing and accessing their own abilities.

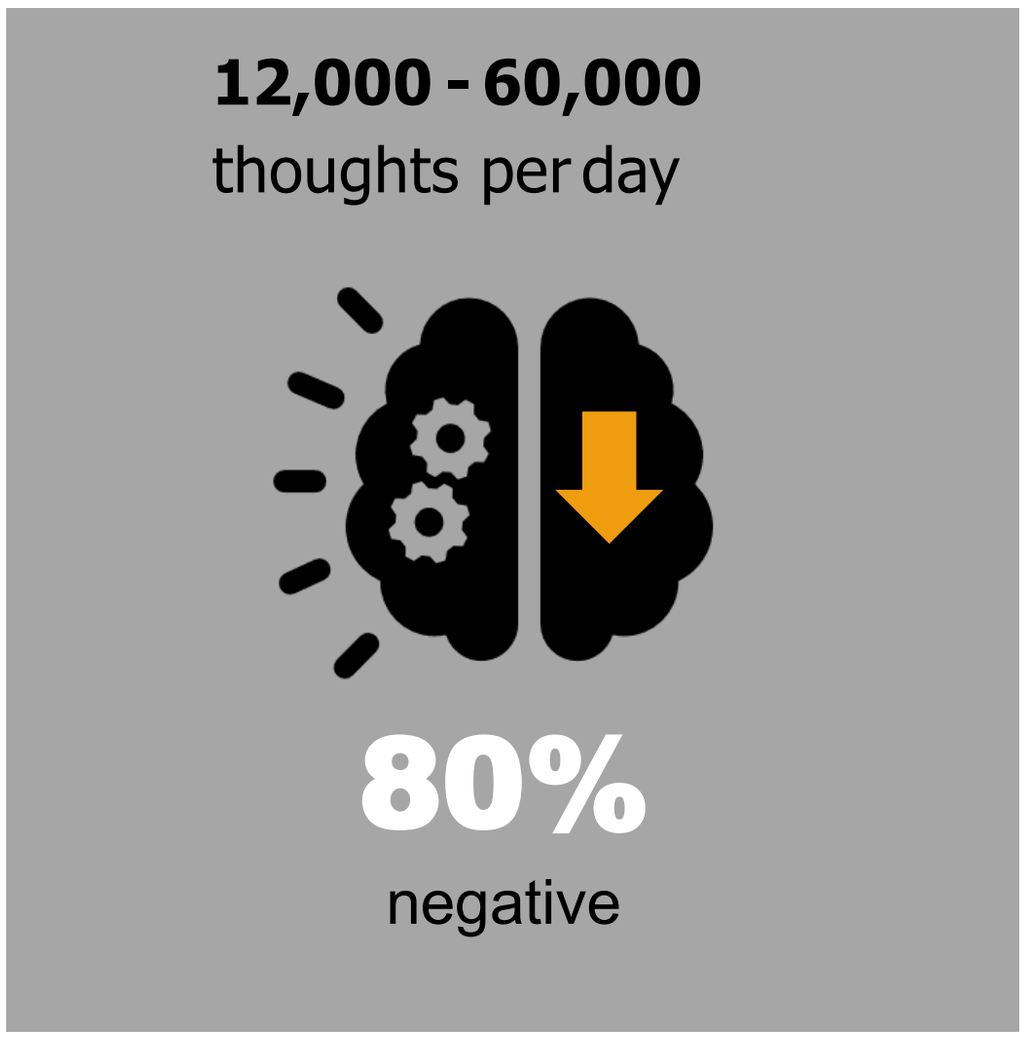
I've coached women like this. They are highly successful, yet other people's attitudes can still get to them. Careless comments get absorbed and fill a woman with self-doubt.

One woman I worked with led a team of professionals at a major university. A few negative remarks crumbled her self-confidence and enlivened either-or thinking. If she was not seen as a good leader, she must be a bad leader. Failing to see middle ground, her fixed mindset sent her down the path of futile people- pleasing.

The first step towards restoring this woman's confidence in herself and her abilities was helping her tune in to her thinking and how it was impacting her performance. As she became aware of her thoughts and the triggers that stimulated them, she was able to interrupt and erase and replace her fixed mindset messages with growth-oriented messages.

For example, overwriting the thought, "I'm a bad leader," with internal dialogue based on truth rather than judgement, such as, "I'm a leader who is learning and growing every day." Not only did she learn how to shift her thinking, she also learned to challenge her thinking with self- inquiry like, "What evidence is there that proves or disproves that I'm a bad leader?"

Our mind will play tricks on us if we don't investigate our thinking. Research tells us the average person thinks 12,000 - 60,000 thoughts per day, and of those thoughts, 80% are negative.



Every negative, judgmental thing we say to ourselves is a misinterpretation of the truth. The brain is a thinking machine and is not above presenting falsehood under the guise of truth.

Like a carnival mirror, our mind bends the truth and reflects back a distorted impression of the truth.

The voice behind these negative thoughts is known as the inner critic. It's the fixed mindset in full motion. The inner critic thinks and speaks in black-and-white terms, is repetitive, and focuses on problems.

In the opposite way, the growth mindset and the voice I like to call the inner advocate are more agile, forward-thinking, and solutions-oriented.

One of the biggest falsehoods people believe is they need to be hard on themselves in order to stay motivated. This is a thought worth examining with self-inquiry.

How often have you been motivated by judgment for any length of time? Hands down, self-compassion beats self-criticism every time because its driving force is underpinned by love instead of fear.

In order to do our best, we must feel calm, secure, and confident. Where our motivation comes from has a lot to do with our performance. Are we motivated intrinsically by things within our control, or extrinsically by things outside of our control?

For many women the origin of their motivation is extrinsic because they trust too much in other people's opinions of themselves. This is one of the fallouts of early messaging gone awry.

When we are motivated extrinsically, we always come up short because we chase vanishing validation that leaves us feeling inadequate and flawed in some way.

Self-criticism motivated by fear asks if we're good enough. Self-compassion motivated by love asks what's good for us.

If women want to prosper, they need to take an honest look at how their thinking is harming them and give themselves the gift of a growth mindset.

A growth mindset broadens our attention to notice useful details and generate creative ideas to maximize our thinking.

CHAPTER 3

CURIOSITY

A STRONG DESIRE TO KNOW OR LEARN SOMETHING

Curiosity is the agent of growth that propels us to explore and step outside our comfort zone, even when a fixed mindset is leading us to feel anxious or uncomfortable.

"How" and "why" questions elicit explanations and are conduits for growth. "What" and "where" questions, on the other hand, are designed to extract facts, which puts them in the realm of a fixed mindset.

There is a time and place for both kinds of questions. What matters is the condition of your heart and the motivation of your mind when you're asking.

Sadly, whether we have a predominantly growth mindset or fixed mindset, by the time we are adults, we have fewer questions and more habits.

It's recognizing we have room to grow that stimulates our curiosity and breaks us out of the bondage of harmful habits.

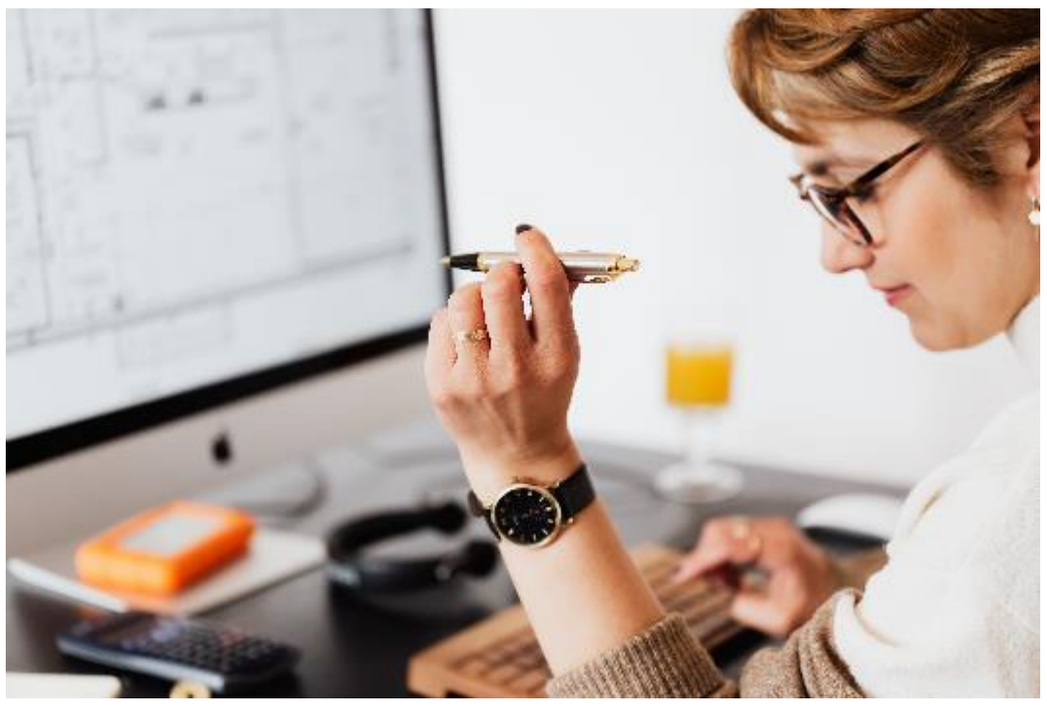
In short, fear kills curiosity, and curiosity gives rise to growth and builds new knowledge. As a society, we tend to rush to action and value effortless acquisition of new knowledge over gaining it with effort.

One of the marks of a fixed mindset is believing if people have to work at something, they must not be good at it. This inclines us to confuse learning things easily with learning them well, but it's not always the people who learn easily who end up the most knowledgeable.

When people learn something quickly, they are more prone to forget it in the long term.

People with a dominant growth mindset admire effort. They believe even the smartest person has to put effort into their achievements. To them, effort and accomplishment go hand in hand.

To stand out and get ahead in today's workplace, women will need to view effort through the lens of a growth mindset.



Modern companies need people who are eager to learn, adaptable to change, and add to their skills as they progress. Asking questions is one of the best ways to learn and acquire new skills, but not according to the drivers of a fixed mindset.

How often have you been in a meeting and not asked something for the fear of looking dumb? I know I have and more than once regretted it later. We're afraid of getting found out. Found out that we are not perfect.

CHAPTER 4

PERFECTIONISM

REFUSAL TO ACCEPT ANY STANDARD SHORT OF PERFECTION

Perfection is a trap. Mostly because it's impossible to achieve. Striving for perfection sets us up for disappointment and keeps us on the hamster wheel of a fixed mindset.

Perfectionism is a serious challenge facing women today. Girls of yesterday who were rewarded for obedient behavior and academic success are the women of today still seeking approval by striving to get everything right.

Hence, a woman ends up exchanging her authenticity for approval. And when this happens, as Brene Brown says in her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, "You stop believing in your worthiness and start hustling for it."

For women to make the transition from perfectionism to healthy achievement, they will need to explore the unseen fear buried behind their fixed mindset and become fluent in the language of a growth mindset. In short, erase and replace the timeworn stories they have been telling themselves.

When we change our narrative, we change our cycle of thinking. A self-compassionate narrative creates a self-enhancing cycle of thinking that values effort, produces better results, and leads to further professional successes. All of which contribute to increased confidence and a healthier, more adaptive way of coping with the world.

And that brings us to the "disease to please." Women are notorious people-pleasers. As much as trying to be perfect is a trap, so is trying to be a wonderful person all the time. Like trying to be perfect, trying to please everyone is also impossible. It can seriously impact a woman's ability to make decisions for fear of offending or disappointing others.

Pleasers are often motivated by the desire to be helpful. The desire to help by itself is not bad, it becomes problematic when doing so is more about earning acceptance than being helpful.

Pleasing others to earn acceptance leads to compromised well-being, shadowing of the truth, and heavy feelings of resentment.

When our sense of worth hangs in the balance of someone else's love, praise, or acceptance, we're coming from a place of fear and a fixed mindset. Out of fear of offending or disappointing, we twist ourselves like a pretzel to meet others' expectations, hustling for our worthiness in a place it can never be found.

As children we were dependent upon adults to fulfill our most basic needs such as food, water, and shelter This reliance naturally arouses a child's survival instincts. But as time passes and we move into adulthood, sometimes we fail to recognize that we have become the adults. While pleasing others may have served us earlier in life and gotten us the gold star, it impedes us now.

It doesn't help that women are naturally expected to be warm and communal. This is both a conscious and unconscious bias. If you think this isn't true, the next time you find yourself feeling insulted by another woman, ask yourself if you would have had the same reaction if the offense had come from a man. I was shocked the first time I did this. Clearly, I carry some of the bias within me.

In either case, if we approach the matter of relating to ourselves and others from a growth mindset, we come from a healthier place of connection that neither defines nor controls our worthiness.

Learning to detach from others' opinions like this is a process. I remember the first time it occurred to me that I was making people false gods with my fierce people-pleasing. I vowed then and there to stop, but some habits die hard. The important thing is I'm aware of it and consistently exercise approaching other people's opinions from a place of curiosity rather than a place of judgement.

In the end, whatever change I experience over the course of this process will be an expression of changed mindset.

Living into my values has been extremely instrumental in helping me quell the disease to please. Living into my values anchors me in an abundance of people's thoughts and opinions, keeping me grounded in my authenticity rather than adrift with every passing point of view.

Here's the thing. How much the world likes or dislikes us is a small matter in comparison to how much we like or dislike ourselves.

We have to start asking what prioritizing other people's acceptance over our own is costing us.

Furthermore, when all is said and done, a woman's worthiness cannot and should not be reduced to how wonderful other people think she is. Worthiness is everyone's birthright, and it can't be bargained for by pleasing others.

CHAPTER 5

CONFIDENCE

BELIEF IN THE POWERS, TRUSTWORTHINESS, OR RELIABILITY OF A PERSON OR THING.

So how does a woman make her way in the world, demonstrating her competence while remaining connected to her worthiness? Confidence is key.

True confidence leads to long-term commitment to growth. The source of true confidence is internal. It does not need external validation. People with true confidence are more resilient and open. They have a dominant growth mindset.

That is not to say that someone with a dominant growth mindset does not have moments of worry and anxiety. They do. We all embody a fixed and growth mindset, and the one that dominates is the one we feed most.

When we are consumed by the disease to please, we are feeding our fear and starving our power to grow. I'm fond of this explanation of power that appears in Amy Cuddy's book, *Presence*. Amy quotes Joe Magee, a professor at New York University, who explains, "Personal power is all about having the confidence to act based on one's own beliefs, attitudes, and values, and having the sense that one's actions will be effective."

That's owning our power. We can't control how other people think or feel about us, but we can control if we show up as our boldest, most authentic selves.

Confidence isn't easy. It often seems fleeting amidst all the shadowing self-doubt. The propensity women have to internalize and dwell on failure and mistakes directly affects their confidence and performance. In many ways, women are their own worst enemy instead of their own best friend.

Women are hard on themselves. They derail themselves by dwelling on setbacks and trying to be overly prepared for the future.

They undergo the dangers of a fixed mindset, such as misguided energy and diminished effectiveness.

Perfectionism, people-pleasing, self-doubt, and aversion to risk are all confidence killers.

Failing confidence is non-discriminatory. It affects women at all levels of success, increasing the effort it takes to get noticed and get ahead.

Despite what a fixed mindset may tell us, confidence is not dependent upon outcome. Confidence is more complex than that. True confidence exemplifies the qualities of a growth mindset by being more about the developmental process than the end result.

CHAPTER 6

SELF-COMPASSION

EXTENDING COMPASSION TO ONE'S SELF

Self-compassion is the fuel behind the process and the driver of our self-assurance. Self- compassion supports action and the willingness to try, all while bearing a compassionate response to our imperfection.

All this collectively connects us to ourselves, others, and our natural capacity for empathy.

In the opposite way, self-doubt reinforces inaction. Women hold themselves back when they hesitate and don't act. Confidence is a choice we can all make, and it begins by choosing to change the way we think.

Just because we may have learned the good girl lesson far too well (and started out with the misunderstanding that we are most valuable when we are doing things neatly and quietly) does not mean we have to keep that understanding.

If we continue to hold back, we do so to our own detriment. Messy behaviors such as making mistakes and taking risks are a critical part of confidence building. We have to get out of our heads and be willing to take risks if we want to build confidence.

A growth mindset will get us moving. Confidence comes from the courage to put ourselves out there. Believing we can learn and develop new skills leads to doing new things, taking measured risks, and rallying resilience when we fail.

The key to developing a growth mindset is starting small. Start by being a keen observer of the relationship between your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Recognize and reframe negative thoughts that come from a fixed mindset.

Remember, you are not your thoughts. Free your sense of self from your thinking and it will be easier to cultivate a growth mindset.